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ABSTRACT

The current procedures for evaluating library faculty at California State University Long Beach, are examined. Librarians with faculty status should be evaluated in a method similar to teaching faculty (i.e., peer review), and it is necessary to adapt the retention, tenure, and promotion (RTP) document currently used in California State Universities to accomplish this. The current RTP document as it applies to issues of library faculty status and the effectiveness of the current evaluation procedures are discussed. Because librarians use skills that differ from the teaching faculty's, judging their performance can be difficult. The RTP document at California State University Long Beach tries to avoid these problems by carefully indicating the skills to be measured. The same procedures, adapted elsewhere in the state, may be useful in developing an evaluation process that will further enhance the effectiveness of librarians. Evaluating librarians by peer review is not only effective, but necessary to the professional development of the individual. Librarians can and should be evaluated using the same RTP document as teaching faculty with appropriate changes made. (SM)

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EVALUATING LIBRARY FACULTY

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ABSTRACT

The writer of the article believes that librarians with faculty status should be evaluated in a method similar to teaching faculty, i.e. peer review. It is necessary to adapt the RTP document currently used in Cal State Universities to accomplish this.

Because librarians use skills that differ from the teaching faculty's, judging their performance can be difficult. The RTP document at Cal State Long Beach tries to avoid these problems by carefully indicating the skills to be measured.

The same procedures, adapted elsewhere in the state, may be useful in developing an evaluation process that will further enhance the effectiveness of librarians. Furthermore the RTP document should be considered by librarians and officially adopted by them for implementation.

HISTORICAL ROOTS

Generally speaking the peer review process for evaluating faculty has been widely accepted at least since 1915, with the founding of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP).[1] As Smith and DeVinney point out, peer review is widely used and except for a few critics, it is usually well received.

Rationales for evaluations by peers have frequently been tied to the idea that teachers of similar academic background can better judge their peers. This form of evaluation, however, raises some eyebrows when applied to librarians of faculty status. Much of the debate centers not on the evaluation, but on the status of the library professional. If librarians are to be considered faculty then evidently their work must be comparable to teaching faculty.[2] Since it is widely accepted that teaching faculty teach, and librarians do not, how then might they be judged on the same level?[3] One solution lies in adapting evaluation criteria for librarians to reflect their expertise as information professionals, thereby eliminating the requirements for

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evaluating classroom performance. When this is done, other evaluation criteria can easily be applied. For example, library faculty at Cal State, Long Beach (CSULB) are required to publish. This obligation is no different from that placed on teaching faculty. Similarly, requirements to conduct original research, sit on committees and devote some time to community service are the same as the teaching faculty's. All of these areas may be evaluated in the same manner as the teaching faculty.

The current retention, tenure and promotion (RTP) policy for librarians at CSULB was adopted in June 1985. As stated in appendix C the criteria for judging librarians include three major areas: I. professional competence and performance; II. scholarly, professional, and creative activities; III. university and community service.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the current procedures for evaluating library faculty at Cal State, Long Beach. Specifically, I will examine the current RTP document as it applies to issues of library faculty status and the effectiveness of the current evaluation procedures.

Much of the discussion surrounding the issue of library evaluation is rooted in history. For most colleges and universities, though, librarian faculty status is relatively young. The discussion is embroiled in effective ways to evaluate all faculty - any faculty - teaching and non-teaching. Peter Seldin explains that there has been a great deal of discussion concerning appropriate skills to evaluate.[4] The question of whether to emphasize publishing or instruction is crucial to the current debate over librarian evaluation. If publishing were the main criterion, librarian evaluation would be simple. That is candidates who publish several times during a tenure period would be easy to identify as promotable. Questions regarding the quality of work could be met by introducing publishing standards. For example, an institution may require its librarians to publish in specific juried or refereed journals.

But the rub of evaluation lies in what to evaluate and how to evaluate some of the more subjective aspects of teaching. Again Seldin has discovered that the single most important factor for evaluating faculty is teacher effectiveness.[5] How this translates into librarianship will be considered later.

Agreement concerning the skills involved in teacher effectiveness are a debate in themselves. The use of students' evaluations are now widely accepted, but these do not adapt well for all the librarians' tasks. Despite the agreement that teaching is fundamental to evaluation the way to evaluate is still uncertain.[6] Many recent studies indicate faculty evaluation is ineffective and produces

uncertain results in faculty. How then, can this be reconciled with the needs of librarians?

ROLES OF THE LIBRARIAN

As librarianship itself is transformed from the traditional model to the scope of information science more demands for technical skills are required. Today's academic librarians have to be skilled in several areas: bibliographic instruction, online searching, database implementation, computerized catalogs, reference, cataloging, and collection development. All of these skills need to be evaluated when judging the competency of a given librarian. Add to this responsibilities like university and library committees and the result is a large task in evaluating librarians.

Each of the skills listed above can be evaluated by examining each area separately. Bibliographic instruction (BI) relates most closely to the traditional model of faculty. In BI classes a professional librarian usually conducts a lecture in his or her specialized area of study (e.g. education or literature) and then proceeds to demonstrate how students of these disciplines may conduct their own research and use the "tools of the trade." Because of the increasing influence of computerized databases many of the BI classes are becoming more technical in nature. In any event a librarian's skill or competency in this area is relatively easy to evaluate. Like the instructional faculty, librarians may be evaluated by students after a BI class or they may be observed and evaluated by their peers, department heads or library management. These reviews could remain confidential or be shared with appropriate personnel. Either way they become a direct part of the librarian's record and do not preclude an overall peer evaluation at a later time.

The area of online searching carries some unique problems of evaluation. Since searching commercial databases is usually done in private with just the patron present (or perhaps not present) it may be considered more difficult for one's peers to evaluate the librarian's skill at searching. Individual patrons could be asked to evaluate the search results, but this can raise questions regarding the competence of the patron to make such judgments. It can be suggested that online searching, like an instructor's private consultations, must simply be left to the individual and not be an area of evaluation. Similarly, database use, and skills with online catalogs are equally difficult to measure. All of these skills fall into the area of "professional competency." They are, however, difficult to measure as stated above and must to some extent either be ignored or

left open to subjective evaluation.

Skilled catalogers are somewhat easier to evaluate within a professional setting. For example, many academic libraries fix a quota of books that must be cataloged. This is one immediate area of evaluation that is easy to determine. A librarian either makes the quota or does not.

Cataloging is one area of librarianship where one's work can be evaluated easily by peers or supervisors. Since there are specific rules to follow in cataloging one's work can be checked and either accepted or rejected. This of course opens a whole new area of consideration. Is the librarian whose work is under such scrutiny really being treated as a professional? This question aside, the process of evaluation does still occur among catalogers.

Every librarian and library student is familiar with the reference interview. Various sources list a variety of steps in conducting this interview, but all would agree the bottomline is the same: providing the patron with the desired information. As professionals, librarians can evaluate the approach used by one's peers and also determine if the appropriate information is given. "Appropriate information" may be as simple as stating that the appropriate information cannot be provided. But the librarian needs to be positive about this before dismissing the patron. It is possible however for this competency to be evaluated. Another major consideration in this first criterion is how the librarian interacts with the patron. Beyond the interview itself, one must consider whether the librarian is adept at putting the patron at ease. That is, is the librarian addressing the patron in a manner that results in good communication or is the librarian's manner such that the individual feels ill at ease with the librarian. These are difficult factors for evaluation, but skilled professional librarians should be adept at determining each other's competency. By comparison a good instructor may be categorized as one who relates well with his students - one who encourages creativity and originality. Are these criteria any easier to measure than a librarian's competency?

As stated above librarians are also evaluated on the basis of their ability to "plan, initiate and conclude work effectively."[6] A simple example here again is collection development. Every librarian has certain obligations with regard to selecting and ordering books within a given budget. As the RTP document indicates this job requires careful planning and follow through. This aspect of the librarian's professional responsibilities do not vary greatly from the teaching faculty's. The latter must also participate in occasional projects or departmental tasks which require the same skills mentioned above.

Collection development is another skill that on the surface appears difficult to evaluate. An evaluator cannot sit and watch a professional librarian select books to add to a collection. A librarian's skill at collection development might be evaluated, however, by evaluating the collection itself. If a given librarian is responsible for the history section and this is considered a weak area within the whole library collection, then the librarian may be considered at fault.

Perhaps the most comprehensive area of library evaluation is the professional reference librarian. The scope of good reference can be quite wide and may require a great deal of subject area background. Nonetheless it is an area which can be carefully evaluated and observed. Being a good reference librarian can include some of the skills already discussed, particularly bibliographic instruction and online searching. However, the most frequently used skills of a reference librarian are those used at the reference desk. Here a professional librarian is called on to interact with patrons, provide information and teach the use of bibliographic sources.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The RTP document also lists several other criteria within professional competence and performance. All are related areas and may be evaluated as indicated elsewhere in this paper. A note of caution here, however. Almost all forms of evaluation result in some subjectivity. Certainly qualities like leadership, judgment and commitment are among these difficult qualities to measure. All the same they are part of evaluating every professional.

The Cal State Long Beach (CSULB) RTP document lists "scholarly activities" as its second criterion. As stated above, this criterion (and the third) are given a lesser weight than the first. This is probably the easiest criterion to compare to the teaching faculty's evaluation. According to this specific criterion, librarians are required to publish and complete original research, meeting the same requirements as teaching faculty. Included among this activity is professional growth. Professional growth considers the "acquisition of new skills or knowledge" gained by the librarian.[7]

Thirdly, the RTP document lists service to the community and the University as criterion for evaluation. This is also a relatively easy area to evaluate since it requires the professional to serve in national, state and local library organizations; serve on library and university committees; and finally to serve the local community.

These three criteria together make up the bulk of the

evaluation for library faculty. All three criteria are adapted from the University's RTP document for all faculty. As demonstrated above it is an easy task to adapt the document to the library faculty. This, however, raises the question of the effectiveness of peer evaluation for librarians. Listing the criteria is only half the job. One must consider whether the criteria and method of evaluation are actually effective and if in fact they help improve the librarian's professional demeanor.

There is little literature on the subject of peer review in libraries. What little is available concentrates more on the subject of peer review and its effect on publishing. As Smith and DeVinney point out there is very little evidence to show that peer review results in much of an increase of publishing among librarians.[8] They do, however, indicate that the least amount of publishing occurs among librarians who are not ccnsidered faculty nor evaluated by peers.

Again the reader must realize that all of the areas discussed above are best considered by one's peers. Even in the area of online searching another librarian is capable of reviewing the online strategy and results. All that is required is maintaining a copy of the appropriate records. Likewise, the areas of cataloging, and collection development are best evaluated by others who perform the task, namely professional librarians.

The current evaluation process is based on criteria developed for teaching faculty. As a result, librarians tend to be at a disadvantage. The result is the RTP document must be adapted to meet the qualifications of a good librarian. This does not eliminate all the criteria used by teaching faculty, but rather, it demands the criteria be adjusted. The rub surrounds the difficulty of evaluating "professional competence and performance." Many of the criteria are important, but very difficult to measure. For example, a librarian spends ten to twelve hours a week working on the reference desk. Here, duties include telephone and personal reference assistance. Much of the expertise in these two tasks involves conducting an appropriate interview with the patron. Often the success or failure involved with the interview hinges on interpersonal skills, i.e. how one effectively relates to another. This is an extremely difficult skill to evaluate. It p actically eliminates any measurable quantity.

Like the teaching faculty, library faculty is evaluated by its peers. For the librarian this results in a very subjective evaluation, since skills like the one exemplified above are difficult to measure. Cal State Long Beach lists among its skills for criteria number one: "quality of performance and productivity; ability to initiate, plan and conclude work effectively." Although these are subjective,

these skills can be evaluated and therefore included among the factors used to evaluate librarians.

CONCLUSION

It is the conclusion of this writer that evaluating librarians by peer review is not only effective, but necessary to the professional development of the individual. Furthermore, librarians can and should be evaluated using the same RTP document as teaching faculty with appropriate changes made.

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Mr. D'Amicantonio is currently a member of CARL and the Special Libraries Association, Education Division.

NOTES

1. Karen Smith and Gemma DeVinney, "Peer Review for Academic Librarians," Academic Librarianship 10 (1984/85): 87.

2. Robert G. Sewell, "Faculty Status and Librarians: The Rationale and the Case of Illinois," College and Research Libraries 44 (1983): 213.

3. Sewell, 213.

4. Peter Seldin, How Colleges Evaluate Professors (Croton-on-Hudson: Blythe Pennington, Ltd., 1975) 15.

5. Seldin, 16.

6. Seldin, 17.

7. California State University, Long Beach, Retention, Tenure and Promotion Document. Appendix C.

8. California State University, Long Beach, RTP Document. Appendix C.